



Saving TEXAS HISTORY

The Texas General Land Office
Archives and Records Newsletter

Jerry Patterson, Commissioner

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This newspaper clipping shows Bascom Giles exiting the Bexar County jail after posting bond following his indictment on three counts of bribery.

All the Way to the Top – Bascom Giles and the Veterans Land Board Scandal

by Patrick Walsh, GLO Researcher

Conspiracy. Bribery. Theft. Corruption. Violence. These are not the words the 49th Legislature of Texas envisioned when Land Commissioner Bascom Giles appealed to them on March 28, 1945 to “do [their] duty on behalf of the Texas veterans” and authorize a land program to provide returning World War II veterans a means to purchase land in Texas.¹

The Veterans Land Act was billed as a noble venture to recognize and reward the sacrifices of Texas veterans, echoing the efforts of past generations. However, in an attempt to personally profit by defrauding the system, it was subverted and abused by the very man who sold the idea to Texans from the start. The scandal was unraveled in parallel investigations by *Cuero Record* managing editor Kenneth Towery and DeWitt County Attorney Wiley Cheatham. It exploited hundreds of Texas veter-

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ans, damaged the credibility of the General Land Office, and, left unchecked, would have cost Texas taxpayers millions of dollars.²³

Documents housed in the GLO Archives, including court judgments, application files, correspondence, the scrapbook of Bascom Giles grand juror Virginia McNeal Conkle, and Kenneth Towery's papers preserve this unfortunate chapter of Texas history.⁴

The mechanics of the scheme were simple, yet highly effective: opportunistic land promoters and businessmen, some of whom had no experience in land transactions, would purchase cheap, unproductive land and have it assessed

well above its market value by Giles and a few complicit state appraisers. They would then sell it to the VLB on behalf of veterans for an immense profit, and kick back a portion of the money to those who had allowed the fraudulent appraisals. The block deals, which were handled exclusively and directly by Giles, included groups of veterans who usually had no knowledge that they were signing up to buy land and were too poor to do so. They were instead given the impression that they were receiving free veterans benefits, and were paid by the promoters to sign paperwork they often couldn't read. In some cases, the signed forms were blank and were filled in later by the promoters or their agents. The promoters were allowed to complete all the paperwork, provide the veterans' down payments, and lease the land back from the veterans for three years, which would allow for payments to be made without any knowledge or action on the part of the veteran. It was intended for the unsuspecting veterans to default on their payments after three years when the leaseback agreements would expire, at which point the land would revert to the state's possession. Having paid for the land at the inflated values, the state would be forced to attempt to unload the worthless land at a huge loss.⁵⁶⁷⁸

In the fall of 1954, events unfolded that set Towery down an investigative path that would lead to the revelation of the VLB scandal. An after-hours meeting between wealthy white businessmen and African-American veterans at the Cuero country club, an "unlikely place" for such a gathering, caught the eye of Towery. Through an African-American

Commissioner of the General Land Office for the Veterans' Land Board and to be applied toward the retirement of the unpaid principal or delinquent interest. Payments made in this manner shall not relieve the buyer of his regular semi-annual installments.

6. Buyer shall maintain a reasonable insurance policy with a duly licensed and approved company to cover any loss incurred on any improvements located on the hereinbefore described property with the loss clause payable to the Veterans' Land Board of Texas. The original insurance policy to be filed with the buyer's contract in the General Land Office of the State of Texas.

7. Buyer understands that the property purchased hereunder shall not be transferred, sold or conveyed in whole or in part until he shall have enjoyed possession for a period of three (3) years from purchase date; provided, however, that he shall have the right to transfer, sell or convey the property at any time after the entire indebtedness to the Board has been paid.

8. Buyer agrees to furnish to the Veterans' Land Board by not later than May 1st of each year during the term of this contract evidence that all taxes for the past year have been paid.

9. Seller agrees to execute a deed under its seal to the original purchaser of the land when the entire indebtedness due the State under this contract of sale is paid.

10. It is agreed between buyer and seller that all of the conditions, limitations and requirements as well as all benefits and penalties contained in the provisions of Acts 51st Leg., R.S., 1949, Ch. 318, as amended by Acts 52nd Leg., R.S., 1951, Ch. 324, together with all rules and regulations promulgated by the Veterans' Land Board, shall be binding upon the parties hereto in the same manner as if they were fully recited herein. The failure of buyer to comply with the terms hereof or with the provisions stated shall subject the contract to forfeiture as provided in the aforementioned Act.

WITNESS our hands this 24 day of August, 1954

Bascom Giles Chairman Elmo L. Battles Buyer
Veterans' Land Board
c/o General Land Office
Austin, Texas
RT 4, Box 166
Address
Cuero, Texas

STATE OF TEXAS)
COUNTY OF TRAVIS)

On this day personally appeared before me, the undersigned authority, Bascom Giles, acting in his capacity as Chairman of the Veterans' Land Board of Texas, known to me to be the person whose name is affixed hereto and acknowledged to me that he executed the foregoing instrument upon the express conditions stipulated therein and in the capacity therein stated.

1954 Sworn to and subscribed to before me this 24 day of August

George W. Stinson Notary Public
In and for Travis County, Texas.

STATE OF TEXAS)
COUNTY OF Travis)

On this day personally appeared before me Elmo L. Battles, known to me to be the person whose name is affixed hereto and acknowledged to me that he executed the foregoing instrument upon the express conditions stipulated therein.

This application, signed by Commissioner Giles and Elmo L. Battles, was for the purchase of 30 acres of land in Zavala County for \$7,200. Battles' confusion over receiving land purchase documents from the GLO helped incite Towery's investigation in Cuero.

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Wiley Cheatham (left) and Kenneth Towery used the judicial system and the news media to expose the Veterans Land Board scandal.

about the propriety of transactions that were being conducted under the Veterans Land Program, and encountered additional evidence of veterans having unwittingly purchased land. These “irregularities,” Cheatham thought, could extend across county lines, and the story “might go all the way to the top.” Towery and Cheatham each sought to meet with Giles to address their concerns. Unsatisfied with the results of these meetings, they chose to move forward publicly. Towery’s first article concerning “certain suspected irregularities in the sale of land under the Veterans Land Program” was published on November 11, 1954.¹⁰

A series of additional articles published by Towery created statewide momentum for the developing story involving Commissioner Giles, who served as chairman of the Veterans Land Board. As more evidence was uncovered, it was demonstrated that Giles had been colluding with appraisers and land promoters under the terms of the Veterans Land Act to generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits for those involved, at the expense of taxpayers and also of the dignity and rights of the unsuspecting veterans, whose identification and veteran status were misappropriated to execute the fraud.

This pattern of fraud was repeated again and again in counties throughout southwest Texas. As the scale of the operation was uncovered, the investigators expanded to include multiple district attorneys, the state Attorney General, State Auditor, Department of Public Safety, and investigating committees in both the Texas Senate and House. Giles had been elected to an extraordinary ninth term as Commissioner just weeks prior to the publication of the investigation into the VLB; however, the increasing statewide attention prompted him to announce his resignation on January 2, 1955, stating “...in view of the recent publicity given to the Veterans Land Board, it now seems best to decline to qualify for the approaching term.” The first indictments against Giles came in March 1955 in Travis County, under charges of theft, being an accomplice to theft, and conspiracy to commit theft, stemming from VLB transactions in Dimmit and Kinney counties. In all, 15 indictments would be leveled against Giles prior to his appearance in Austin’s Travis County Court on July 5, 1955.^{11 12}

Giles was found guilty on July 28 of being an accomplice to the theft of \$6,800, and was sentenced to six years in the state penitentiary. Following his conviction, Giles pleaded guilty to the rest of his pending charges, resulting in a total of 12 six-year sentences and one three-year sentence, to be served concurrently. He reported to the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville on January 16, 1956, becoming the first elected Texas official to be incarcerated for crimes that were committed while serving in public office. He would remain in prison until he was released in December 1958.^{13 14 15 16}

The fallout from the VLB scandal was wide-ranging. In December 1955, the Attorney General and State Auditor concluded that up to that point, 591 veterans and 39 sellers participated in transactions that were “fraudulent, in whole or in part” totaling \$3,554,994. Later estimates included as many as 1,488 veterans in 125 transactions totaling \$10,102,001.30. Towery’s investigative efforts in this story, which “consumed [his] waking moments,” would earn

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newspaper staff member, he found out that “they were talking about land.” Days later, an African-American Cuero veteran received a document from the VLB indicating he had purchased land, but the veteran, Elmo Battles, asserted “I’ve bought no land. How could I buy land?”⁹

In October, Towery’s sources at the Cuero courthouse indicated increased activity in the county attorney’s office. Towery, having still not put all of the pieces of the puzzle together, met Cheatham, who confirmed his own investigation into the country club meeting and the Elmo Battles matter. Cheatham and his father, State Rep. Tom Cheatham, had begun to raise questions

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him the 1955 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting, and would help launch his career in campaign management. Wiley Cheatham was appointed District Attorney by Governor Shivers in the midst of the prosecutions stemming from the scandal. The victims of the scandal—the veterans who were tricked into signing up for the VLB program—actually came out ahead. Many had received cash or other incentives to sign their contracts, and they were able to keep these payments.

James Earl Rudder, appointed by Governor Shivers to replace Giles as Commissioner, focused on the task of cleaning up the tarnished images of the Texas General Land Office and the VLB. He removed or accepted the resignation of the appraisers who worked under Giles and replaced them with people he felt he could trust. He also worked with legislators to close loopholes in the Veterans Land Act to prevent future abuses. After 18 months on the job, Rudder asserted that “The General Land Office has now been restored to a place of confidence in the eyes of the public.” Since Commissioner Rudder’s tenure, the VLB has upheld that place of confidence, creating innovative programs to continue to serve Texas veterans.¹⁹ ✨



The arrest of Bascom Giles and his subsequent \$100,000 bond made front page news in the Sunday, March 6, 1955 edition of “The Cuero Record.” Giles was arrested nearly four months after his initial interview with Kenneth Towery.

Footnotes

- ¹ Cox, Patrick L. Land Commissioner Bascom Giles and the Texas Veteran’s Land Board Scandals (Buda: Master’s Thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1988), 39.
- ² The Veterans’ Land Act was enacted in November, 1946; however the Veterans Land Board didn’t hold its first meeting until June, 1949. \$25 million in bonds were issued (and another \$75 million in 1951), with which the state would purchase land on behalf of Texas veterans, who would repay the balance of the mortgage to the state at an interest rate of 3% repayable over 40 years. Purchases were limited to no more than \$7,500 and no less than 20 acres, and the land could not be re-sold for three years. A 5% down payment was required.
- ³ Byler, Harold and Ross McSwain. Texas Politics and Greed (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005), 4.
- ⁴ The Towery papers and Conkle scrap book are publicly accessible, and contain a wealth of newspaper and magazine articles about the scandal and its investigation, as well as video of Edward Murrow’s 1955 “See It Now” episode featuring Towery.
- ⁵ Cox, 71-72.
- ⁶ Byler and McSwain, 128.
- ⁷ Cox, 44-47.
- ⁸ Ibid., 93-94.
- ⁹ Towery, Ken. *The Chow Dipper – A Personal and Political Odyssey* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1994), 144-47.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 144-47.
- ¹¹ Brooks, Raymond. “Bascom Giles Quits Texas Land Office.” Austin American-Statesman 2 January, 1955: 1. Print. Virginia C. McNeal Conkle Scrapbook (OS.CSB). Archives and Records Program, Texas General Land Office, Austin.
- ¹² Byler and McSwain, 24-25.
- ¹³ Concurrent sentencing is a period of incarceration in which the total time of imprisonment is equal to the length of the longest sentence issued.
- ¹⁴ Byler and McSwain, 86.
- ¹⁵ Kaderli, Elizabeth. “Veterans’ Land Board Scandal,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mqv01>), accessed February 24, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- ¹⁶ In addition to Giles, only one other man, B.R. Sheppard, served time in prison. Convictions of other major players Cletus Ernster and T.J. McLarty were overturned, and C.O. Hagan was acquitted. Many of those involved paid restitution rather than face the possibility of prison sentences.
- ¹⁷ Towery, 161.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 169-172.
- ¹⁹ Texas General Land Office. “History of the Land Commissioners,” (<http://www.glo.texas.gov/what-we-do/history-and-archives/history-of-archives/history-of-land-commissioners.html>), accessed February 24, 2014.

GLO Hosts Genealogypalooza 2014

by James Harkins, Director of Public Services

The Texas General Land Office and Texas State Genealogical Society collaborated to hold the very first Genealogypalooza at the GLO headquarters in Austin on May 17. The goal was to bring attention to a broad range of Texas genealogical resources in an open, fun and practical way to those in attendance, and further cement the partnership between the Land Office and Texas State Genealogical Society.

Judging from anonymous comments left by attendees, the unique workshop was an instant hit.



Genealogypalooza sold out all 100 seats in just a matter of days to a very enthusiastic genealogical audience.

"This event was OUTSTANDING!," one attendee wrote. "I go to a lot of genealogy seminars and this was one of the best I have been to over the years...I had no idea that GLO had so much information. Thank you for pulling back the curtain to Oz and opening up a whole new place to track our beloved ancestors. It is a new chapter to our Family Book, and most importantly, YOU HAVE BROUGHT GENEALOGY INTO A NEW ERA!"

"Can I say WOW!," another attendee wrote. "What a great event! How special it is to be able to see the GLO documents upfront and right in your hands. The speakers were EXCELLENT quality! It was a great first start!"

Seven experts from across Texas spoke about various topics important to genealogy researchers today, as well as the tools that enable successful genealogical research.

Bill Buckner, Manager of the Genealogy Center of the Waco-McLennan County Library, discussed "Core Fundamentals for Beginning Genealogy Research." This class covered the basic concepts, skills, search strategies and resources needed to become a proficient family history researcher. Buckner helped genealogists get started by discussing how to process what they already knew, how to get organized, how to collect information, and how to evaluate information for additional clues about their ancestors.

Sue Kaufman, former President of the Texas State Genealogical Society, is the Manager of the Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research / Houston Public Library. Her presentation, called "Planning Your Research Trip," described how researchers can make the most of their time spent on research trips, as well as tactics for finding the most important information.

James Harkins, Director of Public Services for Archives and Records at the Texas General Land Office, presented the "Genealogical Resources of the GLO." With items dating back almost 300 years, this presentation covered the use of land records for genealogy.

John Sellers, a fifth-generation native of Hopkins County, Texas and current mayor of Sulphur Springs, gave a presentation on "Researching Your Ancestor's Plot of Dirt: The Adventures of Courthouse Land Research." Mayor Sellers shared a detailed study of courthouse research concerning land records using deed indexes and deed records to prove relationships. Additionally, the mayor addressed affidavits of heirship and civil court records.



Bill Buckner discussed several different forms of research that are beneficial to genealogists.

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Daniel Alonzo, General Land Office Archivist, discussed a very important topic for any family researcher with his presentation “Time vs. Money: Preserving Family Documents.” Alonzo outlined the difficulties in finding time to preserve family history documents and finding the money to adequately preserve them. The goal of his presentation was to make preserving family documents and photographs affordable with an investment of time.

Caroline Pointer, of For Your Family Story, a genealogy research, social media marketing and technology consulting business, answered a question that intrigues many genealogists: “I Started Researching My Genealogy on Ancestry.com - Where Do I Look Now?” Pointer discussed the increased popularity of genealogy spurred by television shows like “Who Do You Think You Are?” that prompt viewers to sign up with Ancestry.com, create a family tree and begin their family history search. Many new researchers eventually come to a research brick wall if they use only Ancestry.com to fill out their family tree. This presentation outlines exactly where family history enthusiasts can look next—both online and offline—and offers tips and strategies for each to help tear down those brick walls.

Margaret Schlankey serves as the Head of the Reference Services Unit for the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her presentation, “Resources for Genealogists at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History,” examined the numerous resources for genealogical research that are unique to the Briscoe Center. She listed the archival collections, newspapers, directories and indexes available to family researchers.

Attendees also enjoyed a special opportunity to tour the GLO Archives and Records, where interesting items were featured, including historic maps, correspondence and land grant files of notable Texans that exemplify what genealogical researchers may find at the Land Office regarding their ancestors.

This is the first time that the Land Office and the Texas State Genealogical Society have partnered on this type of event. The goal of the Genealogypalooza was to bring attention to Texas genealogical resources in an open, fun and practical way that will be accessible to those in attendance.

This event sold out very quickly. If you are interested in future genealogical programming from the Texas General Land Office, please call 512-463-5277 or email archives@glo.texas.gov. ✨

Be a Save Texas History Benefactor: A Call to Map Collectors

Don't know what to do with your old, original Texas maps? If you have a Texas map collection, no matter how big or small, and decide that you no longer want to collect and store it, are interested in downsizing, or find that your children have no interest in it, please consider donating your collection to the Texas General Land Office Archives and Records.

The General Land Office has one of the most extensive Texas map collections in existence, with more than 45,000 unique maps, sketches and drawings that document Texas, the American Southwest and Mexico over the last 300 years. The collection is maintained by three full-time staffers, is stored in a state-of-the-art facility that optimizes map preservation, and is constantly growing. We are fully committed to digitizing and placing online every single map in our collection, in order to provide scholars and other interested persons the best and widest access to the unique cartographic history of Texas both now and into the future.

All donors are identified on the Land Office website, and all historic maps are professionally conserved (if needed), digitized, and then made available to the world from our website. Additionally, donations made to the Land Office for public purposes are tax deductible pursuant to Internal Revenue Code §170(c)(1), so this is a great way to get a tax write-off and also help Save Texas History. For information about donating your Texas map collection, please email mark.lambert@glo.texas.gov or call 512-463-5260. ✨

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MAP SPOTLIGHT

Connected Map of Austin's Colony, 1837 (tracing 1892)

Map #1943 / tracing, #1944

by Alex Chiba, Map Curator

In 1833, the empresario Stephen F. Austin contracted with the brothers John P., Thomas H., and Gail Borden Jr. to create a map showing the extent of settlement within what was known as "Austin's Colony." The result was this very large, rare manuscript map that was completed in 1837¹ and shows the location of original surveys within the colony along with the name of each grantee and the dimensions of each survey boundary line (map #1943).

The map covers a large swath of southeastern Texas where much of the earliest pre-Republic colonial settlement occurred. Almost all of the surveys on this map lie between the Old San Antonio Road to the northwest, the San Jacinto River to the east, the Gulf Coast to the southeast and the Lavaca River to the west. Austin had multiple contracts with the government of Mexico during his time as an empresario and this map focuses on Austin's First Contract from 1821 (the "old 300") and Second Contract from 1825. Most of his later contracts covered lands to the north of the Old San Antonio Road and are not reflected on this map. The only town labeled on this map is San Felipe, the de facto administrative "capital" of Austin's Colony. However the towns of Mina (Bastrop), Washington, Harrisburg, Brazoria, Columbia, Bolivar, Quintana and Matagorda are spotted with no label. Many roads are also shown, including: the Old San Antonio Road, La Bahía Road, the Gonzales Road and numerous other minor roads linking the various settlements in the colony. However, only the Old San Antonio Road is labeled.



Connected Map of Austin's Colony, 1837 (GLO Map # 1943).

Aside from being perhaps the only extensive and accurate map of Austin's Colony at the time, the fact that the Borden brothers had a hand in compiling and projecting it adds to its historical significance. John P. Borden became the first Commissioner of the General Land Office, appointed by Sam Houston in 1837, and part of his mandate was to gather all the land records in the new Republic and compile county maps very much like this one created for Austin. Thomas H. Borden was the colony's official surveyor, a position his brother, Gail, assumed after Thomas resigned. Gail Borden Jr., an accomplished surveyor, was perhaps the most famous of the three. Along with John, Gail surveyed and laid out the town of Houston, founded a newspaper with brother Thomas, and started the Borden Company where he later invented both a meat biscuit which required no refrigeration and what we know today as condensed milk. Borden County in Texas is named for Gail Borden Jr.

Unfortunately the paper and ink used to create this map beginning in 1833 were of very poor quality. Times were tough in early colonial Texas and high quality ink and paper were hard to come by.² The ink used was the common iron gall ink which was very acidic. Its use, combined with poor paper quality, led to very aggressive fading and "burning" through the paper. Additionally, this map was further endangered in 1842 as it was one of the items that was taken and buried for almost two years by the citizens of Austin, along with many other records of the government, in an incident known as the Archives War. It was because of this ongoing degradation that the General Land Office made a certified copy via tracing in 1892 (map #1944).³

This tracing is a beautiful map in its own right and more clearly reveals the vast data conveyed by the original since

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names and labels are much more readable on this version. Aside from its condition, the 1892 tracing only differs from the 1837 original by including a certification statement of accuracy by W. L. McGaughey, Commissioner of the GLO from 1891-1895. Within the last decade, both the original and tracing have been professionally conserved to stabilize them and prevent further degradation.

Today, these maps are often featured on tours of the map vault because of their historical significance and beauty. It may be difficult to tell based on scans of these maps, but the originals measure 93.1 x 82.6 inches (map #1943) and 90.8 x 85.6 inches (map #1944), making them two of the largest maps in the GLO map archive.

Conservation for the original 1837 map and 1892 tracing was made possible by generous donations from Gardere Wynne Sewell, LLP, and the Texas Association of Counties respectively. A donation to digitize both maps was provided by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in 2012. Both maps are part of the permanent archival map collection at the General Land Office. Copies are available of each version at a reduced size (roughly 70%) for \$40 or available at full-size, in two pieces, for \$80.



Certified tracing of the Connected Map of Austin's Colony, 1892 (GLO Map # 1944).

To schedule a tour of the map vault to see these two maps, please email archives@glo.texas.gov. Both maps are also viewable online on the GLO website at full resolution. ✱

Footnotes

- ¹ The map title block states "Commenced by S. F. Austin 1833, Completed by J.F. Perry 1837". This reflects the fact that Austin died in December 1836. J.F. Perry was Austin's brother-in-law and was administrator of his estate.
- ² In a draft letter within the GLO archives from J.F. Perry to the Texas Congress, Perry bemoans the lack of paper and cites this as one reason he needs more time to provide the documents and maps from Austin's Colony as instructed. J.F. Perry to the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives, [No Date]. GSC, Box 4:22, Spanish Collection, Archives and Records, Texas General Land Office, Austin. <http://www.glo.texas.gov/ncu/SCANDOCS/archives_webfiles/arcmaps/webfiles/landgrants/PDFs/1/0/8/7/1087779.pdf> (Accessed April 23, 2014).
- ³ F. G. Blau was the GLO draftsman who traced the 1892 map.

GLO In The Classroom: What's in Store for Educators from the GLO Archives and Records in 2014?

There are several Primary Source workshops, presentations and activities offered. We offer a selection of workshops that focus on specific topics in Texas and American history using resources from the Texas General Land Office Archives collection:

Confederates in the Archives. This workshop focuses on the experiences of Texans during the American Civil War using primary source letters and maps from the collection.

"A Speedy and Final Close..." This workshop centers on the Cherokee living in East Texas during the 1830s and how their fate was determined by forces beyond their control.

Auf Wiedersehen, y'all. This workshop traces the movement, settlement and historical impact of German migra-

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tion on the history of Texas.

Five Fateful Years. What's significant about 1720, 1821, 1836, 1846 and 1861 in Texas History? Are these years connected in any way? This workshop will analyze one document from the collection for each year listed to try and answer this question.

These workshops can be modified to fit any professional development schedule. For more information on these and other educational efforts, please email archives@glo.texas.gov, or call 512-936-9644. *

Preserving Your Family Archives

by Daniel Alonzo, GLO Archivist

If you've ever been to a lecture or workshop on the topic of archival preservation you've probably heard the aphorism: "You can either spend a lot of time or a lot of money." If you have the means, you can spend a lot of money and pay a company to digitize all of your personal archives and store them. If you don't, there are reasonably affordable measures you can take to preserve your historical materials for future generations.

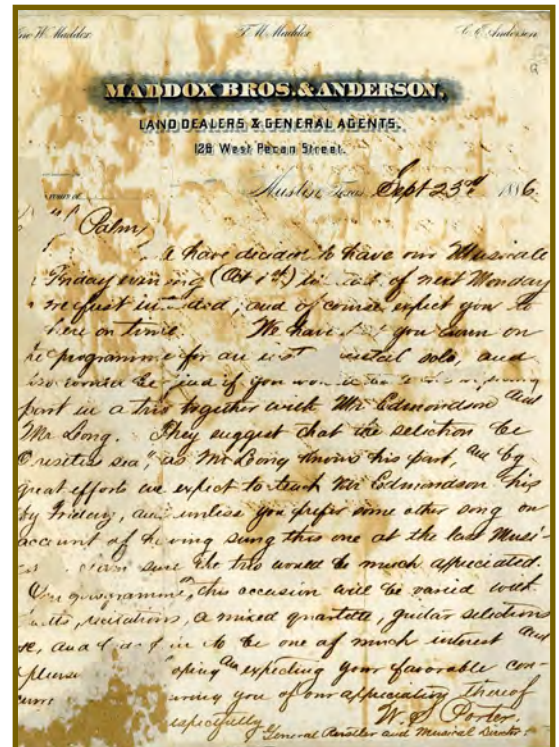
One method is to enclose your personal archives in a microclimate, adding a second level of protection. There are many companies that make a variety of acid-free products, some more affordable than others. Placing documents in acid-free folders and placing these folders in acid-free boxes creates a microclimate. Inside the acid-free enclosure, documents are protected from light, dust and insects. Climate fluctuations within the home are mitigated by the microclimate.

There are two types of historic material that merit special consideration: scrapbooks and photo albums. They cost time and money to preserve. They're emblematic of a central tension within archival preservation: Do you preserve the original object, flawed as it is, or do you preserve the individual components that make up the

object, thereby changing what its creator intended? Twenty

years ago, this was a difficult decision to make. Today, it has become possible to do both through digitization.

You can create a digital representation of a scrapbook or photo album before preserving its component parts. Digitization can be a useful tool for preservation but it comes at a greater cost than preserving only the physical object. The General Land Office has invested in this process to give the agency's documents wide exposure to a broad audience while keeping the material protected. As with the physical materials, there is a range of affordable options for digitizing historical material. *



Henry, O., 1862-1910. [Letter from O. Henry to Belle Palm], Letter, September 23, 1886; AR.L.015(004), Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas. The letter was damaged from acidic glue, an acidic cardboard backing and a clumsy attempt to remove the letter from its backing.



Bridge over Barton Creek, Photograph, December 1894; PICA 00985, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas. The photo is faded from light damage and stained from an acidic card stock backing.

Making Sense of Maps in the Classroom

by Buck Cole, K-12 Education & Outreach Coordinator

TEKS 7.12B. Trace the development of major industries that contributed to the urbanization of Texas: Transportation.

Transportation.

Let's face it; it's not exactly the most popular topic in Texas, especially for students. Like it or not, the development of transportation and its impact is crucial to understanding the evolution of this state, and the catalyst for this transformation was the railroads.

Eager to expand westward after the defeat of the Plains Indians in the 1870s, the railroads provided the means to connect West Texas to more settled areas in the east. In a frontier state like Texas where waterways and roads were unreliable, and vast, open expanses demoralized even the heartiest of settlers, rail transportation provided much greater speed and dependability than the more conventional horse and wagon. Without the advent of railroads, the settlement and commercial development of Texas would have taken much longer. The railroads impacted the movement of people and goods and ultimately transformed the social, political and economic fabric of our state. How was Texas able to pay for this transformation? Public land. Texas had millions of acres of public land available to grant to companies for improving the state's infrastructure. The government of Texas was able to finance the construction of thousands of miles of rail lines by granting sections of land to railroad companies for every mile of track the railroad company built. Today, railroads are still an important part of our state's modern transportation mix.



Map #93397, A Geographically Correct Map of the State of Texas from 1887, could be used in the classroom to teach about transportation during the late 19th century.

So how do we get kids interested in such a seemingly mundane topic? Maps of course! Getting kids engaged in learning about railroads is just a map away. Maps are attractive and interesting resources for the study of railroads, and who really doesn't like looking at historic maps? Luckily, the Texas General Land Office Archives houses plenty of maps related to railroads, especially during the period of their most rapid growth, 1870 – 1890.

One map especially appropriate for teaching railroad history is the Texas and Pacific Railways map created in 1876, map #93397.

There was a lot going on in Texas in 1876, but a glance at this map shows that most railways were primarily in the eastern part of the state, but for one glaring exception. Why was it necessary to connect rail lines across the entire state? Ask your students to research the year 1876 in Texas to see what people, places and events may have affected the development of railroads during this period. In what areas of Texas are rail lines not expanding? What might be some reasons for this? You might have students compare this map to other railroad maps of Texas created before and after 1876 to gain a clearer understanding of railroads impact on Texas. Regardless of pedagogical strategies used, and there are a number of ways to engage the kids, railroad maps are the perfect vehicle (pun intended) for studying an important aspect of Texas transportation history. *

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TEXAS FATHERLAND

APRIL 1842 AND ALL HAIL THE FATHERLAND ... IN TEXAS?

This week in Texas History, brought to you by this station
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April 20, 1842. Mainz, Germany. After winning independence, Texas is seen as an immigrant paradise, especially for Germans looking to escape poverty and repression.

Today, twenty-one German noblemen form a group to help Germans start a new life in the young Republic. The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants, or Adelsverein, wants to build a new German fatherland on Texas soil.

Two years later, the group's first commissioner, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, establishes colonies at New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.

While dreams of the fatherland fail, the Adelsverein brings over 7,000 Germans to Texas by 1847.

The German invasion of Texas began 172 years ago,
This Week in Texas History.

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